Indicators for the effects of children's work

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1   Children's work is not always bad

This paper points to indications that children's work frequently and in various ways contributes to their well-being and development. In many cultures, children are encouraged to work as good child-rearing practice. Since work is an essential component in the livelihood and social life of adults, it is natural that children learn cultural and other practices relating to work from an early age. In this perspective, which is supported by a growing body of research (see Bourdillon *et al.* 2011, 88–107), the experience of work is fundamental to growing up and to the transition to adulthood; work is a continuous component of child development, conveying benefits at all ages; and children learn to participate in work gradually as they acquire competence, rather than being expected to enter the workforce at a particular age.

Despite the importance of work in socialization and children's healthy development, international organizations for development and for children's rights often assume that work is a negative indicator with respect to child well-being. Work is held to be incompatible with schooling and so to inhibit children's life chances, to perpetuate cycles of poverty, and to expose children to unnecessary risk. Such assumptions are particularly evident in the assessment of interventions, when removal of children from work is taken to indicate successful intervention, without consideration of whether the children end up better or worse off. In this paper, we challenge the widespread assumption that

children's work is automatically a negative indicator of well-being. Instead, we emphasize a need to develop indicators to distinguish situations in which children's work contributes to well-being, and to improve the likelihood of such outcomes. Such situations should take into account aptitudes and competencies of children, as well as their socio-economic status and gender.

Much research on children's work has been promoted by organisations committed to abolishing 'child labour', resulting in an emphasis on risks and harm, largely to the exclusion of benefits. This corresponds with a more general pattern in which research on childhood in poor communities focuses on negative indicators that need to be changed, to the neglect of what promotes children's well-being in these communities (see Saith and Wazir 2010). If benefits of work are ignored, the range of prohibited work becomes wide, based on the belief that children are thus better protected. But if work offers substantial benefits to children, prohibition carries the risk of depriving children of important opportunities, particularly pertinent for children who are already in some way disadvantaged; it can deprive children of protection when they illegally seek the benefits of work; and it can drive children into more exploitative and hazardous work.

Discourse on 'child labour' often conflates work that is in some way harmful or hazardous to children with work that transgresses international standards for a minimum age for entry to employment. Although it is a widespread matter of faith that children can be protected from exploitative and harmful work through a minimum age legislation, we know of no research that correlates exploitation, hazards and harm on the one hand, with age and employment on the other; but we do know of many case studies showing children's well-being damaged by being removed from work following minimum-age standards. We return to this point in the discussion of policy.

The hazards in children's work and the benefits it confers are largely contextual and fluid. Hazardous situations can be made safe (sometimes a useful function of intervention), and safe situations can become hazardous. Hazards and benefits vary with the growing competence of young people and the training they receive. They vary with status in society and particularly with gender. They vary as young people grow in autonomy and agency, and with their perceptions of their work: the right of children to be heard on decisions that affect them is

often ignored in discourse on 'child labour'. Such variation points to the need for nuanced economic, educational, and psycho-social indicators relating to the outcomes of children's work in their lives. In this paper, we refer to some indicators that have been used; but our aim is not so much to list established and proven indicators, as to appeal for a critical and reflective use of indicators that can contribute to a holistic appreciation of child well-being and development.

3.1 Material

The most frequent reason children give for working is to earn money, either out of necessity or to improve their lives. The contributions of children is sometimes an important factor in families' strategies for overcoming economic shocks (Chuta 2014), especially when the family has no steady income from adults. Contributions to the family of children's earnings in relation to levels of poverty can be enumerated; contributions of children through unpaid productive work may be as important but are more difficult to assess.

Information on expenditure of children's earnings on items that contribute to their quality of life, or in ways that inhibit development could also be useful. That children contribute to the family through their work does not guarantee that they benefit from their contributions. Information is needed on who receives and spends any resulting income, and how it is spent. Qualitative data reveal several patterns (not necessarily mutually exclusive), which have different effects on child well-being:

- the child receives the income and uses it to improve his or her life, or perhaps on immediate neutral or even destructive pleasures;
- the child receives the income and passes some or all to the family or guardian;
- the guardian receives the income and the child is happy about benefits to the family;
- the guardian receives the income and spends it without consideration of the child.
- the child does not receive an income but learns technical, business and life skills through work that will lead to a future career

Such information is rarely found in existing databases.

There is some evidence, and much plausibility, that work can improve health of children in poverty through improved nutrition, which has well-developed standard indicators. Several studies have shown correlations between work and nutrition (e.g., Understanding Children's Work Programme 2008, 32; 2009, 38; Baker 1998). Children working on city streets have sometimes proved to be better nourished than those left in their home communities (Gross *et al.* 1996; Baker 1998). Controls are needed to indicate whether better nutrition is because better nourished children are more likely to work or because work provides the means for better nourishment—of both working children and their siblings.

It is more difficult to find indicators for contributions of work to health, by, for example, encouraging exercise; or by reducing stress in ways that will be discussed under emotional development below. Nevertheless, it remains possible that appropriate work has additional benefits for children's health and mental well-being.

Apart from coping with material necessity, income from work can improve the quality of life of child workers and their families in a variety of ways. It is common in poor communities for children to earn money for their own schooling and that of siblings, suggested when working children occasionally show higher school attendance than do their non–working counterparts (examples cited in Edmonds 2008, 3641). Children may choose to save for their futures but only if they have access to secure savings mechanisms, which comprise another indicator to assess well-being. Earnings can contribute to the growing autonomy of young people and release them from restrictions of their homes, especially important in communities that restrict and subordinate girls; while these benefits have been reported in qualitative studies (e.g. Boyden *et al.* 1998, 100; Chandra 2007, 70), generalised indicators are needed.

Further, risks need to be socially contextualised (Crivello and Boyden 2012). Exposure to pesticides may be related to where children live and play in relation to chemicals rather than to their work. While exposure to pollution and traffic may hinder children's overall health, children may face such exposure even if they do not work. Besides, Invernizzi (2003) points out that over time, children become adept at negotiating traffic, making it less dangerous. Risks of injury and hazards to health from workplaces need therefore to be compared to risks

and hazards the children would face if they were not working rather than to an idealised, risk-free childhood.

It has been observed that children work more in households with more productive capital: as small-scale farming increases output and income, children may have more work to do; and in programs of micro-finance for family enterprises, growth in the enterprises can initially entail more work for the children (Bhalotra and Heady 2003; Mueller 1984; Carothers 2015). In such situations, children's work is an indicator of movement away from poverty. Additionally, among street children in Lima, young people viewed work opportunities, especially consistent employment, as a sign of improved well-being—preferential to living unemployed in the streets (Aufseeser 2012).

The question remains whether immediate improvement in living standards is at the cost of the child's longer-term development. There is a widespread assumption that while children's work may relieve poverty in the short term, in the longer term it perpetuates poverty by interfering with schooling. We return to this assumption in the next section.

Studies of the relationship between work in childhood and later incomes have produced mixed results.[1] In Brazil, early work in manufacturing and service appeared to have long-term positive effects, while early work in agriculture correlated with lower adult earnings in the long term (Emerson and Souza 2007). A study in Vietnam indicated that work experience correlated with increased incomes in the medium term (five to ten years), which more than compensated for lower school attainment (Beegle *et al.* 2005, 31-32). A recent study of Egyptian data correlates learning on the job with improved later incomes, in contrast to vocational schools, which appeared to have no impact on later earnings (Krafft 2013). In the U.S.A., part-time employment in adolescence has been correlated with subsequent employment up to ten years after graduating from high school and appears to reduce the amount of time youths spend unemployed (Hansen *et al.* 2001, 131).

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[1] The recent ILO report (2015, 17) that more ex-child labourers end up in the poorest quintiles does not indicate the effects of work: more detailed data and analysis are needed to say whether children from poor backgrounds would be better off if they had not worked.

Later earnings can be an important indicator of benefits and harm in work, but an understanding of the effects of work requires going beyond broad statistics to an examination of specific mechanisms operating in different contexts. We need to establish the kinds of situation in which work is likely to provide long-term benefits as opposed to those in which work reinforces poverty in the long term. The long-term benefits that sometimes result from work take us beyond considering work simply as economic necessity for some, and relate to the kind of learning that takes place in and through work, which leads to consideration of how work can promote or hinder the holistic development of children.

2 Work as a negative indicator

When large numbers of children are spending much of their time working to the detriment or exclusion of schooling, there are problems to be addressed. But this does not tell us what the problems are.

A common problem that drives children to work is poverty. At the macro level, there are broad correlations between children's work and poverty. Children may respond to absolute poverty by working for basic necessities, and especially for food. Children may also work in response to the frustrations of relative poverty, when their quality of life is far below what they see around them or in the wider world. Children in poor families, especially girls, often have substantial burdens of work to maintain the home. However, not all poor children work and not all working children are poor. Indeed, where part-time work is deemed an attractive experience for young people, those who are better off may have an advantage in finding employment (for an example in New York, see Besen-Cassino 2014). Another common problem is poor educational systems available to disadvantaged children, pushing children to work (see section 3.2 below). In these scenarios, children's work is not so much the problem as an indicator of problems, which children attempt to overcome through work even while the work may involve hazards of its own. Stopping children from working does not solve the problem; but it removes the indicator.

Specific kinds of work or conditions of work *are* the problem when they damage children in the short or long term, in which case the only course may be to remove the children from the work. However, conditions can often be

improved to overcome mental and psycho-social damage, and some physical hazards; rather than removing children from work, it may be possible to make work safer (see Carothers 2015). There is much literature on health hazards (for a review see Parker *et al.* 2010), although hazards are rarely contextualised and compared with risk in other activities (such as sport); the assumption is often that the mere existence of hazards justifies a general ban on work. Evidence has not shown a general correlation between children's work and their health (Levison and Murray-Close 2005).

There are also situations in which children are compelled to provide cheap and pliant labour to provide comfort and wealth for others, where the problem lies in societal structures and values. Such situations demand intervention. Although they dominate in the stereotypical images of child labour, they do not cover the majority of child workers.

While in some situations children work in exploitative conditions or experience negative effects of work, there are a number of reasons against simply regarding work as a negative indicator with respect to well-being:

1) The approach often assumes causality from correlation.
2) It fails to consider children's own perceptions of their work and experience.
3) It overlooks how work may be simultaneously positive and negative.
4) It relies on idealized assumptions of what children would otherwise be doing with their time, rather than observing children's time use.

The bulk of this paper shows that work may also be linked with various positive indicators of child well-being. These show that although high levels of children's work may indicate problems in society, for the purposes of policy and intervention at the local level, more nuanced indicators are needed to disentangle the conditions under which work may be positive rather than negative.

3   Work as a positive indicator: Benefits in work

Generally, young people work in attempts to improve their lives. To understand the place of work in their lives, we need to enquire why they are working, and

discover the benefits that they expect or hope to derive from work. Such enquiry can point to indicators of benefits.

3.2   Educational

The greatest concern about children's work is that it impedes school learning, supported by many studies that show inverse correlations between work and school attendance and achievement, and correlations between years of schooling and subsequent earnings. The precise mechanisms and conditions that relate work to school are not so clear, and there are some contrary data (see Edmonds 2008, 3641).

There are many extraneous variables that contribute to both children's work and lower school outcomes, including: levels of poverty and nutrition, education of parents, availability of schools, geographic location (especially rural versus urban); quality of schools, perceptions of poor returns on schooling, the aptitudes of particular children (such aptitudes are particularly difficult to control for). Without controlling for these extraneous variables, it is not valid to conclude from correlations that poor school outcomes are the effects of work (as does ILO 2015). Even when an association between work and school is established through appropriate controls, the causality can work both ways: excess work can damage school outcomes, especially in poor communities; but also poor school outcomes can encourage children to look for positive experiences elsewhere. For example, the long term panel study in St Paul's Minnesota did not show evidence of work generally resulting in lower grades, but it did show evidence of young people already getting low grades at school looking for positive experience in longer hours of work, which did not result in further lowering of grades, but did appear to benefit their work trajectory after leaving school (Mortimer 2003; for a discussion of varied relationships between work and school, see Bourdillon *et al.* 2011, 108–132).

On the other hand, the benefits of schooling are frequently exaggerated, failing to take into account aptitudes of particular children, quality of schools, and job markets in specific economic situations (see Glewwe 1996): in many

situations, formal schooling offers little promise of employment.[2] Poor quality of schooling, poor access to schooling, poor aptitude for schoolwork, discrimination against particular children in school in ways that exacerbate existing inequalities, and violence associated with schooling: all these push many children away from school to look for positive experiences elsewhere and particularly in work. Simply stopping children from working rarely results in substantial numbers returning to school. Several studies suggest that time given to work mostly comes from leisure or passive time rather than school time.

Much 'child labour' discourse assumes that work and school are incompatible and mutually exclusive (e.g., ILO 2015). In both high- and low-income countries, however, many young people combine work with school, with varying degrees of success. Motives vary: in poor countries necessity or perceived necessity is common, and children frequently work specifically to pay for school expenses; in all countries there are also social reasons and perceived benefits in developing a life trajectory through work. While schools often ignore children's working experience, there have been several examples of educational projects that take into account the needs and experiences of working children (Bourdillon *et al.* 2011, 128–129); in Scotland, it has been suggested that school systems could benefit from taking into account young people's work experience (e.g., Howieson *et al.* 2006, 222–229). There is an argument that even well-resourced schools need to pay more attention to children's specific interests and opportunities for learning outside school (e.g. Washor and Mojkowski 2013). This has some support from the findings of a programme in Egypt, which provided young people (14–24) from technical schools in Egypt with work placements (see references to MKI in PPIC-Work 2009): although participating students spent less time in classrooms than their full-time academic counterparts, skills learned from work (being on time, being conscientious, developing a good work ethic) helped some improve their classroom performance.

Rather than a generalised condemnation of work, therefore, we need indications of how work can successfully be combined with school, and under

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[2] In some countries, age of leaving school does not correlate with improved subsequent employment (ILO 2015, 25–27, figures 18, 19, 20). Situational variations in returns from schooling are likely to be greater within countries.

what conditions. A corollary is how schools accommodate outside activities such as work. When children wish or need to combine work with school, recent studies in Ethiopia show that the burden of managing time to fit both work and school falls on the children, and that the inflexibility of some school systems make this particularly difficult for them, as does the failure of some adults to comprehend the demands being made on their children (Pankhurst *et al.* 2015). Similarly in Peru, children were denied entry into the classroom if their hands were dirty or for failing to arrive on time, hindering the ability of working children to balance school and work, and leading to feelings of exclusion (Aufseeser 2014b).

While work sometimes interferes with schooling, it can itself be educational in the broad sense of developing 'the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential' (UNCRC, article 29,1a). Part-time work combined with school can help young people learn to manage time and money. But the learning is broader. In high income societies, young people seek internships for work experience that looks good on their CVs; others believe they learn from the experience of part-time or temporary work (e.g., Besen-Cassino 2014). In poorer communities also, paid work and unpaid work in family enterprises can provide learning experiences, which are difficult to capture in generalised indicators.

A growing body of research emphasises the importance of practical participation in children's learning processes, in preference to more passively receiving instruction (e.g. Rogoff *et al.* 2014). When young people learn on the job, whether in family or commercial settings, they learn by observing others, imitating them (often under supervision of a more experienced peer), and gradually acquiring competence. This is how young people throughout the world learn domestic skills, as well as agriculture and animal husbandry: they start with simple tasks and gradually take on more complex tasks as they grow in competence. Even in modern urban settings, panel studies show young people developing trajectories of part-time work, starting with simple jobs and using this experience to find more interesting jobs as they mature.

Learning on the job is evident in the way many crafts and trades are transferred from one generation to another. There is, however, more in such learning than simply acquiring technical knowledge and skills. A recent study

(Krafft 2013) used the Egypt Labour Market Panel Survey to consider returns from training and skills. Egypt had developed a system of vocational training, but later incomes of those with formal vocational secondary education, especially of recent graduates, were not significantly higher than those who had dropped out of school. (Elsewhere it has been noticed that children taken out of work and placed in vocational training institutions frequently fail to practice the learned trade—e.g., Wouango 2015, 136–137.) There were, however, considerable returns on informal apprenticeships and on-the-job training in Egypt. Moreover, employers commented that they like their apprentices to start young, as young as ten, so as to learn early good habits of work. In apprenticeships, apart from technical skills, children learn about entrepreneurial skills, and to take part in social networks that help to provide a livelihood. Formal training institutions are not the only, nor necessarily the most effective, way of acquiring skills; and young people do not necessarily benefit from being removed from work and placed in training institutions: data are needed on how skills are subsequently used.

Work experience and on-the-job training are increasingly being recognised as helpful in overcoming difficulties of youth unemployment (see, e.g., IPEC 2013). The learning depends on the situation, and on variables such as gender: boys for example may be able to learn important career skills through their work and later earn good incomes, while girls in some cultures do not work outside the home after marriage and so benefit less from their work-related skills (Zibani 2009). There remain gaps in information on the outcomes from such experience, especially for younger children.

In many rural societies, young people also learn social and cultural skills and values through their interactions while participating in community work. Later employment patterns indicate that similar learning can take place in work in more complex societies, where work experience is valued by young people and sometimes by their future employers. Young people broaden their range of social relations and learn to handle employers, customers, and job situations, and so develop a trajectory of temporary and part-time jobs.

Even street work can provide learning, resulting in a trajectory towards improved livelihoods. Several studies have shown how urban children learn entrepreneurial skills by selling small items, sometimes under the supervision of

adults (Invernizzi 2003; Sharp 1996, 37-38). One study found mathematical skills that Brazilian child street vendors acquired through their work to be better developed and more useful than those that children were learning in school (Nunes *et al.* 1993). A recent study in Peru showed trading children acquiring language skills that could serve for upward mobility more effectively than classroom skills (Aufseeser 2014a; 2012, 261; see also Huberman 2012). Street children have been observed to learn 'entrepreneurial thinking' that allowed them to solve other types of problems in their future work.[3]

Work that carries some risk can convey important lessons. Case studies show young working migrants developing strategies following experience of exploitation and cheating by employers and others, an important lesson for life (e.g., Thorsen 2014). A recent study argues that parents of Santa Lucia 'desire is that their children acquire a gamut of skills for future survival, skills that will enable them to negotiate both a competitive work market and the moral and spiritual dangers of the adult life-world' (Mayblin 2010, 44). These benefits are revealed by qualitative studies, but are difficult to capture in generalised indicators.

Apart from learning directly through work, there is much anecdotal evidence of children developing communication and analytic skills through organizations of working children, which enable them to protect their own interests in the present and develop political leadership skills in the future. Young adults who had participated in Peru's child workers' movement directly attributed to their participation increasing awareness about rights and the state's responsibility to protect those rights; this early participation inspired some to continue to participate in workers' unions or as rights advocates as adults (Aufseeser 2012). Broader large-scale studies assessing outcomes of children's organisations related to work are still needed.

Rather than assuming children are being exploited in employment which is impeding their education, we can look for indications that they are learning in and through work. Although there are a wide range of studies correlating children's work with school outcomes, few consider the specific conditions under which work and school can be successfully combined—especially important given

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[3] Conversations by author Richard Carothers with staff of Street Kids International.

the large numbers of children who actively juggle work and school. Further, little research considers the importance of learning outside school.

3.3 Psycho-social

<u>3.3.1 Individual</u>

In stereotypical 'child labour', children are 'put' to work, are treated without respect, and lose all control over their lives. This is not typical of children's work. Indeed, children often enjoy their work, and say that they would like to keep up some work even if it were no longer necessary through poverty (Bourdillon *et al.* 2011, 38). Work gives them the chance to associate with peers out of their homes—especially important when homes lack resources or where life at home is severely restricted. Work is a social activity.

Although in Western thinking work is often opposed to play, children often combine work and play. Initially, playful imitation of work activities are the first steps to acquiring competence. There are many ways in which children work playfully (Bourdillon *et al.* 2011, 26, 38, 102–103).

Working children frequently speak of choosing to work, even while they acknowledge a degree of duress arising from their poverty. Work enables them to develop a degree of agency beyond the autonomy that comes from control over income: it enables them to take some control over their lives, a key feature in well-being. Panel studies have shown children developing work trajectories, using experience in simple jobs when younger to obtain more rewarding work later. Especially for those who find little expectation from home and school, work gives them hope that they can overcome difficulties and improve their lives. Positive emotions are notoriously difficult to measure, which explains why they have been so neglected by research in spite of their importance for human well-being (see Vaillant 2008).

Work can contribute to growing self-esteem. Young workers speak of feeling proud of what they achieve through work, especially when they contribute to resolving family problems (Crivello *et al.* 2012, 227–231). In spite of problems of combining work and school, young workers in Ethiopia frequently mentioned good feelings arising from their work, sometimes expressed as feeling 'blessed'—by their parents and by God (Pankhurst *et al.* 2015). Working children

sometimes speak of work enabling them 'to be someone'. This can be especially important for children denigrated by relative poverty or by failure at school.

When they contribute to their families and communities, children gain status: they are recognised as responsible and gain rights as contributing members and citizens of their societies. There is an important gender aspect to this. Contributions of work can enable girls to reduce certain customary restrictions, allowing girls' access to social networks and friendships that they would not otherwise have had. Work has occasionally been related to delaying pressure to marry (e.g, Amin *et al.* 1998).

Contributing to recovery has been observed to mitigate the trauma of shocks (IICRD 2006). When children learn to deal with stressful situations and overcome obstacles with appropriate support, this can improve self-confidence and foster resilience—especially important for children growing up in environments which are poor in social and physical resources (Liborio and Ungar 2010; Boyden and Mann 2005). In the right circumstances work can provide arenas of comfort from tensions at home and school (Call and Mortimer 2001), as well as material support and an expanded network of adults on whom to rely (Aufseeser 2012, 273; Invernizzi 2003).

Panel studies have shown long-term benefits related to work in childhood. From a long-term study of a poor immigrant community in Boston, George Vaillant found industriousness in youth the strongest predictor of mental health in adulthood (Wolf 2009). Industriousness included attention to schoolwork and to any other kind of work.

Work can contribute both to current well-being and to child development. Since work is a social activity as much as it is an individual one, perhaps more significant is the way it can contribute to social development and social relations.

3.3.2   Relational

We have mentioned that one of the reasons why young people like to work is the social opportunities it offers. Work can convey important benefits for social development.

Robert Serpell (2011) showed that in the societies he studied in Zambia, the development of communication and social relationships is valued more than the

motor and cognitive skills that dominate Western concerns in child development. In judgements of children's intelligence, a sense of social responsibility is combined with cognitive alacrity. He argued that such pro-social goals, which receive little attention in competitive school systems established under colonialism[4], should not be dismissed as an out-dated rural perspective; they have a constructive place in contemporary society. Children develop these social skills in activities out of school, and work can contribute.

In their work, children experience having others depending on what they do, a key feature of social life; children frequently comment on learning responsibility through work. The UNCRC speaks of the preparation of the child for a responsible life in society (article 29d), which requires some experience of responsibility in childhood—something demanded by the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (article 31): it could be argued that social responsibility is an indicator of child wellbeing. Responsibility starts with tasks in the home and caring for siblings; as children grow in competence, it continues into family enterprises and productive work. In Western societies, young workers have commented on having responsibility in their jobs, which they do not feel at school. In addition, they believe that through work they develop a 'work ethic' that will help them later in life (Levison and Roberts 2015). In African societies, work is embedded in relations with families and communities—in children's acceptance of responsibility for others and in their claims on their communities (e.g., Pankhurst *et al.* 2015). Part of this embeddedness lies in children learning tasks and skills by accompanying parents or older siblings, at the same time strengthening relationships through shared experiences—components of social capital. As work gives adults an identity and a place in society, so children's work is a component in acquiring an identity with a place in their communities, and growing into citizenship.

Indicators could be developed on the exercise of responsibility by working children (starting with how they use income), and resulting social cohesion, both

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[4] Similarly, Canadian aboriginal culture is damaged for children in residential schools: http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/government-policy/the-residential-school-system.html (accessed 10 August 2015).

as children and later as adults. An important indicator of social and moral benefits from work is how in later life working children and non-workers fit constructively into their communities and establish stable and well-functioning families.

Some literature suggests that employment of children leads to behavioural problems (e.g., Greenberger and Steinberg 1985). A study of working and non-working adolescents (aged 16–18) in the U.S.A. showed that those who worked were a little more likely to disagree with their parents over such things as dress, friends, going and staying out, helping in the house, sex, smoking, money, school, and family (Manning 1990, 192). Children with prior problematic behaviour at school or at home, however, are more likely to look for paid employment (Apel *et al.* 2006, 358-360). Mortimer's panel study in the USA showed working children entering earlier into smoking and drinking than their non-working peers, but multivariate analysis linked this trend more closely to particular peer groups than to work. When the adolescents reached early adulthood, behavioural patterns evened out, and children who had worked during high school moved into adult family roles in a normative manner (Mortimer 2003, 165). Working children in South America argued that, far from making them delinquent, their work kept them from getting involved in criminal activities or begging, and allowed them to live a decent life in spite of their conditions of poverty (Liebel 2001, 60-61). Work can provide structure and teach responsibility to young people sleeping in the streets or using drugs: enrolling young people in school can be ineffective without first addressing their lack of a home or income, or their drug problems; while work can provide them with routine and stability (Aufseeser 2012). In such situations, work can be protective.

In contrast to responsibility arising from work, a frequently expressed fear is that the alternative to work is idleness, which can lead to various vices and anti-social behaviour—particularly when no other occupation is readily available, because the children are permanently or temporarily out of school, or have free time in school holidays or between school hours. Both parents and children may consider it better for children to accompany and assist their parents at their workplace, than to remain idle and uncared for at home. In Lima, Peru, for example, children expressed fear of staying at home alone, where they felt

vulnerable to cold, boredom, dogs, and gangs, concerns often echoed by their mothers (Aufseeser 2012; 2014a).

4. Implications for policy

What does all this mean for policy and intervention, and for indicators research? Once we have established considerable benefits in work for children's well-being and development, the danger becomes clearer of prohibiting beneficial work by conflating the concept of harmful work with work that violates international standards on a minimum age for employment. We return to the position of the ILO in particular, which describes 'child labour' in terms of work that is hazardous or harmful to children or hinders their development[5], but continues to assert that the Minimum Age Convention (138 of 1973) is 'the fundamental standard of child labour' (ILO 2003, 8). It acknowledges that some work can be beneficial to children, but pays no attention to how such benefits can be assured and assumes without justification that they do not lie in work proscribed by its minimum-age standards. The UNCRC article 32 implicitly accepts this assumption: it asserts the right of every child to be protected from work that is exploitative or hazardous or harmful, then proceeds in implementation to consider only age and employment. There is no evident reason why prohibition of work below a certain age should be considered a right of children, especially since ILO Convention 182 (1999) on the Worst Forms of Child Labour now prohibits all children's work that is harmful or hazardous or impedes their development in any way—irrespective of age. Logically, Convention 138 should be discarded as surpassed, since it only adds to the prohibitions of Convention 182 a further prohibition of work that is not thus harmful. This is to discriminate against children rather than defend their rights.[6]

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[5] http://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm (accessed 5 August 2015)

[6] For a fuller discussion see (Bourdillon *et al.* 2011; Bourdillon *et al.* 2009). From a study of 59 countries, Edmonds and Shrestha (2012, 26) did not find evidence to 'suggest an influence of minimum age of employment regulation on child time allocation that is commensurate with the level of policy attention to promoting the regulation.' A study on India suggests that one result of minimum-age legislation was to reduce

Assessments of benefit and harm can be difficult, especially since both usually relate closely to context. The simpler criterion of age of entry into employment, supported by powerful international organisations, becomes attractive in policy and intervention as an assumed proxy for harmful work. While the stated aim is to protect children from harmful or hazardous work, practice focuses on age of employment.[7] The mismatch between intention and practice often works against the interests of children, and it enables businesses to *appear* to be concerned about child labour while ignoring conditions of work or needs of children. This mismatch results in several anomalies.

For example, in the early 1990s, tens of thousands of children were removed from work in the Bangladeshi garment industry under threats to the export market in the U.S.A. Follow-up studies found that very few of the retrenched child workers ended up in school (special schools were established subsequently but accommodated only a small fraction of retrenched child workers). Many were pushed into worse kinds of work. There was evidence of deterioration in diet and access to health care. Loss of experience and seniority meant lower incomes when they returned to work at a later age (Bourdillon *et al.* 2011, 181–190). Yet years later, reduction in the proportion of child workers in the Bangladesh garment industry was deemed a criterion of success (Nippierd *et al.* 2007, 35).

More generally, interventions based on minimum-age standards often focus on formal employment (particularly in export industries), where the best jobs usually lie; it largely ignores informal and unpaid work, which can be more exploitative. Such interventions are furthermore not concerned with the working conditions of older children (ILO 2015, 44, figure 23, reports little reduction in hazardous work for the older age group). On the grounds that younger children

children's wages and so increase their working hours to meet family needs (Bharadwaj *et al.* 2013).

[7] For example, UNICEF, Save the Children International, and UN Global Compact agreed a policy document on *Children's Rights and Business Principles* (UNICEF *et al.* 2012). The glossary (p.7) describes 'child labour' in terms of harmful work; but the implementation (p.19) is firstly about removing children below a certain age from workplaces, while discussion of harm to young workers is secondary in the text and came later in time.

should not be working, support is sometimes denied to those who need or want to work (e.g., Jacquemin 2006; Muoki 2015). The contributions of children are denigrated as 'help' and remain unpaid for fear of the child labour stigma (e.g. Orellana 2001). In rural communities, children are legitimately involved in all kinds of work for their families, but are prohibited from undertaking benign tasks in export-oriented family plantations and lose the learning such tasks provide.

Another anomaly is the denial of continuity in growing up. Gradual entry into the labour market is hindered.

Anomalies appear at the country level. One of Peru's goals regarding childhood is to promote their wholesome development. It reports that protecting children from child labour, defined specifically as eradicating work below age 14, is one indicator of wholesome development (Ministerio de la Mujer y Poblaciones Vulnerables 2012); in fact, the absence of 'child labour' does not itself directly correlate with improved well-being, and could in certain contexts mean a child is worse off. On the other hand, the Ethiopian Central Statistical Agency counts as 'child labour' 28 or more hours a week of household chores by children up to the age of 14 (Central Statistical Agency, Ethiopia, 2000), while research indicates that far fewer hours adversely affects schooling; such a definition can be expected to reduce resistance to campaigns against child labour while leaving much harmful work unattended to. In 2014, the Government of Bolivia listened to the complaints of working children and adjusted the Children's Code to meet their wishes and needs by allowing them to earn under protected conditions from the age of ten; instead of acknowledging this attention to children's concerns, human and child rights experts widely condemned this as a retrograde step in the fight against child labour and exploitation (Liebel 2014). In all these situations, attention to indicators of benefit and harm to children, rather than assumed values, would be advantageous to children.

Reports and studies, especially those sponsored by the ILO and the World Bank, frequently equate high child labour rates with a lack of development, and assume that development requires the elimination of child labour (ILO 2015, xiii). The possible benefits of work are not discussed, and so are not weighed against costs in children's lives. It is assumed that children should be protected *from* work; there is no discussion of protection *in* their work, of what comprises

decent work for children, nor of how the benefits that could be derived from work might be protected.

If children's interests are to be served, there is need to develop and emphasize indicators of benefits to be derived from work to balance indicators of harm. Over ten years ago, Martin Woodhead (2004) indicated ways to do this. His suggestions have been used in studies relating stress and psychological problems to work situations (e.g. Hesketh *et al.* 2012; Gamlin *et al.* 2013); but little has been done to develop generalised indicators of the benefits of children's work.[8]

One of the problems with the currently dominant approach to children's work, as is the case with much child protection, is that it tries to deal with a particular aspect of children's lives and fails to consider their well-being holistically. To limit attention to specific institutions like work or school, without seeing them in the wider context of children's lives, can result in specific apparent improvements in the institution and greater damage elsewhere (Myers and Bourdillon 2012). A holistic approach to child protection looks not only at the removal of risk, but protects also opportunities for growth and development.

A holistic approach requires attention to the social context in which children live and grow. Rather than focus on protection from harm, we should be attending to what communities do to enable children to flourish. Research should attend to what promotes well-being and strengthen these factors. When children work in an attempt to mitigate the problems they are facing, we need ways to assess whether in fact the work does improve their situation rather than aggravate it. When viewed in the context of children's lives rather than against some idealised childhood, we find that appropriate work in appropriate conditions can itself be protective: apart from constructive occupation out of school hours and avoiding violent situations and harmful activities, work can offer learning for life and convey resilience.

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[8] Martijn Hofmann and Susan Gunn in the ILO are currently preparing a report on assessing the psycho-social state of child workers, referring to Woodhead's call (2004) to balance positive and negative. It remains to be seen whether balance will be achieved.

5. Conclusion

We have pointed to findings that in the right circumstances children can benefit from work. Economic benefits have been recorded both in the short and the long term; these are particularly important for children in resource-poor communities and families, but have also been recorded in wealthy societies. Work can provide learning experiences, contribute to the transition to adulthood, and help to develop children to their full potential. Work can contribute a child's individual, social, and moral development. On the other hand, the wrong kind of work, or work in the wrong circumstances, can be very damaging to children's development.

It cannot be assumed therefore that 'child labour' necessarily indicates a lack of national or personal development, or that it is exploitative. When children and young people seek the benefits of work, a general prohibition can deny children access to the better jobs and conscientious employers, pushing them instead into less amenable kinds of work. Rather than focussing on hazards in an argument to minimize work, it would be more in children's interest to focus on ensuring that their work is decent and beneficial to them. The direction to take in specific instances should be based on evidence, so that interventions to promote children's well-being effectively mitigate risks, reduce harm and enhance benefits in children's work.

Much of the evidence for benefits from work come from qualitative research that pays detailed attention to context. Indicators of educational and psychosocial benefits are difficult to develop, and in most cases need to be adapted to specific situations with inputs from children and local communities, making them unsuitable for comparative purposes. They also need to be adapted to the age and maturity of specific children. In the appendix, we offer a summary (not exhaustive) table of benefits and harm to look for in children's work, which may help to guide indicator research. We emphasize that many indicators have to be adapted to specific situations and that they may change as children grow or as the situations changes. To effectively establish positive and negative outcomes of work in children's lives, ideally long-term studies are needed that can place work in the contexts of children's changing lives.

Appendix: table of potential benefits and harm in children's work

	Potential benefits	Potential harm	Suggested indicators
Material			
Economic	Improved livelihood—for worker and other children in family, including material improvements and such things as education Growing autonomy Rights in family resources Experience and networks for future employment	No or inadequate remuneration Remuneration taken by guardians or others	Income for the child or family Use of income – for schooling, better nutrition Children contributing to the growth of a family business, helping the family move out of poverty Who receives and spends the income? Expenditure related to quality of life Access to saving Later income
Health	Improved nutrition—for worker and other children in family Access to health care	Unhealthy environment Tiredness from excessive work or lack of sleep	Nutrition of working children and their siblings Access to health care Health indicators
Growth	Exercise	Excessive work hindering growth	Growth
Working conditions		Excessive hours, poor lighting, excessive noise, cramped conditions	OSH assessments, productivity rates A possibility of improving conditions
Hazards	Learn to deal with dangerous situations	Toxic chemicals Air polluted by dust or vapours Dangerous equipment Abusive punishment	Rate of injuries in relation to other activities Occupational safety and health assessments of workplaces, codes of conduct within work places Changes in work conditions over time
Educational			
Learning	Life skills, trade skills Learning to interact with adults, customers, etc. Experience for future labour-force work Learning to manage time and money Learning discipline Enhances formal schooling	Prevents or hinders schooling Loss of freedom, dignity Gender discrimination, sexual harassment	Correlations between work hours and school and indications of causality (if possible through longitudinal studies) Compatibility of school system and work Work and school expenses Later trajectories of employment Learning technical, business and life skills

			Later use of skills Language and numeracy skills learned through work Problem solving skills
Organisations	Protection of rights Self-esteem Leadership skills		Awareness of rights Awareness of gender equality issues Development of child / adult partnerships Effective advocacy
Psycho-social			
Recreation	Escape from a dreary home	Loss of leisure	Children's perceptions Enjoyment of work
Agency	Growing autonomy Sense of purpose and hope, especially for those out-of-school Develop resilience by dealing successfully with stress Discipline	Forced to work with no choices Lose control over life in an abusive work situation Loss of confidence after failing to cope with excessive stress Loss of opportunity for creative activity	Willingness to work and degree of compulsion Control of work trajectory Control over income and products of work Autonomy / restrictions Engagement with business owners to improve work
Self-esteem & status	Sense of achievement Status in family and with peers Empowerment Improved status for girls	Denigration, work not appreciated	Psycho-social well-being, including subjective well-being and perceptions of work Response to shocks Positive emotions
Responsibility	Develop a sense of responsibility Develop citizenship and social identity	Anxiety from excessive expectations	Irresponsible/responsible behaviour patterns of working & non-working children Subsequent patterns of behaviour
Relations	Broadening of relationships with adults and peers Relief from tension at home or school Overcoming difficulties Shared experience with working parents Improved relations in the home	Independence and loss of adult guidance Harmful relations in the workplace Disrupted relations when away from home Social isolation Tensions in the home	Family relations Support networks Subsequent family history Well-being in relation to others Respect/status in family/community

(Adapted from Bourdillon *et al.* 2011, 175–176)

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